

## THE CHURCH, SPOUSE OF CHRIST

**Thirty-second Sunday of Ordinary Time<sup>1</sup>**  
**November 12, 1978**

*Wisdom 6:13-17*

*1 Thessalonians 4-12-17*

*Matthew 25:1-13*

My sisters and brothers, imagine that we are part of the group of people listening to our Lord Jesus Christ when he proclaimed the famous discourse that is called the eschatological discourse. This discourse is contained in chapters twenty-four and twenty-five of Saint Matthew's gospel. Jesus has left the Temple of Jerusalem where, as we saw on previous Sundays, he was engaged in those discussions that were an omen of the tragic end: his enemies were filled with so much hatred and envy that it was impossible for things to remain the way they were. How sad when a prophet points out his bloody destiny! Jesus leaves the Temple and travels toward the Mount of Olives --- from which place one can still look down upon the city of Jerusalem. But now one will no longer see the beautiful Temple that was being repaired by Herod, rather one will see the esplanade of the Temple that is abandoned, desolate and the mosques of Muslims.

But at that time Jesus was seated with his disciples on the Mount of Olives and the disciples pointed out to him the Temple buildings. Jesus spoke to them and said: *You see all these things, do you not? Amen, I say to you, there will not be left here a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down* (1). This is the beginning of the long eschatological discourse and like all the prophets, Jesus is looking toward the future and speaks on two distinct levels: he refers to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the year 70AD when the Temple will be destroyed but he is also referring to a more distant reality, the end of the world. These present catastrophes, the earthquakes and the wars that destroy our beautiful buildings are nothing more than signs of the final destruction when even the sun and the finstars will fall from their orbits, when the Son of Man will appear in the majesty of his glory and call out to the dead: *Come to be judged*. The end of the world, the final catastrophe.

You can read about this, my sisters and brothers, in the twenty-fourth chapter. Because of time the Church does not present us with this reading today but during the week it would be good for the base communities to reflect upon this chapter. The Church, however, presents us with a parable from this eschatological sermon (2). Jesus is warning people about the end of the world and the destruction of Jerusalem --- these events will occur when people least expect it. Therefore people must be prepared in the same way that the watchman is vigilant and does not sleep because the thief waits for the watchmen to be careless before entering. The coming of the Son of Man will occur in the same way. This coming is explained in two parables --- one of which was read today (3) and other will be proclaimed next Sunday (4), at the end of the Liturgical Year. There are only fifteen more days in the present Liturgical Year and then we will begin a new year and our preparation for the Nativity. Let us take

advantage of these observations at the end of the year and see them as the Divine Master's warnings about our future! Let us not play with this gift of life!

Jesus says that all the words that he had just spoken concerning the kingdom of God could be compared to ten virgins who, according to the custom of the time, accompanied the bridegroom. The bridegroom would go out to meet his bride and when the bridegroom took the bride (with the authorization of her parents), he brought her to his house and there created a new home. This ceremony was celebrated with a great feast offered by the friends of the bridegroom. The ten virgins are the protagonists of today's parable. I want to entitle today's homily with a beautiful title that is suggested by Christ himself: the kingdom of heaven is a marriage between Christ and the Church or, in other words, the Church, the spouse of Christ.

This comparison of the spouse is often used in the Old Testament when referring to the promise of redemption and God's love and concern for humanity --- creating women and men, gifting them with intelligence and different abilities, cherishing them and leading them through history. God's love for the chosen people is compared to the love of a bridegroom for his bride. Thus when Jesus remembers the events and the promise of the Old Testament and proclaims his gospel, this comparison comes to mind and he compares himself to the bridegroom. When the Pharisees criticize Jesus and his disciples because they do not fast, Jesus says: *Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast* (5).

When John the Baptist is asked if he is the Messiah, he says: *The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; the best man, who stands and listens to him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made complete; I must decrease* (6). We find this beautiful image in the book of Revelation when Saint John writes: *I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband* (7). The bridegroom always looks lovingly on his bride. The day on which she, dressed in white, hands herself over to her husband, she appears radiant, almost heavenly. In the book of Revelation we see the Church compared to the New Jerusalem, the city of God, and the spouse of the Lamb.

Therefore when the Second Vatican Council chooses Biblical images to speak about the Church, it uses this comparison of the bridegroom and the bride and proclaims the following words that could be applied to her as an epithet: *The Church which is called "that Jerusalem which is above" and "our mother" is described as the spotless spouse of the spotless Lamb. It is she whom Christ "loved and for whom He delivered Himself up so that He might sanctify her." It is she whom he unites to himself by an unbreakable covenant, and whom He unceasingly "nourishes and cherishes." It is she whom once purified, He willed to be cleansed and joined to Himself, subject to Him in love and fidelity, and whom, finally, He filled with heavenly gifts for all eternity, in order that we may know the love of God and of Christ for us, a love which surpasses all knowledge. While on earth she journeys in a foreign land away from the Lord, the Church sees herself as an exile. She seeks and is concerned about these things which are above where Christ is seated at the right-hand of God, where the life of the Church is hidden with Christ in God until she appears in glory with her Spouse* (8). In this beautiful description of the Church, I find three thoughts that today's reading offer us about what marriage is: first, it is a covenant; second, it is waiting; third, it is a consummation, a wedding feast.

## Marriage is a covenant

The first reading is an echo of the Old Testament that is proclaimed in the gospel. If Jesus is going to speak to us about the Church and about entering into a marriage relationship, then let us look at the first reading to see what is reflected there concerning marriage. We discover that the Book of Wisdom describes God's longing and searching for women and men as well as the joy of those persons who are open to this love of God.

Those who have come to the Cathedral this morning and all those who participate in the liturgy in their parishes with a true sense of faith and with a desire to search for God --- this is precisely what is described in the first reading from the Book of Wisdom. We are told that the dialogue between God and the human person is the result of God's initiative. Wisdom is radiant and unfading (9) but at the same times waits for an opening and an acceptance on the part of women and men. There are people who close their hearts to God's wisdom. Since we are using the comparison of a wedding feast, we could use it here: when two hearts find a harmony, love begins. The couple begins to grow in love and one day this love, which began at the time of the first meeting, has become so great that it becomes finalized in an eternal covenant. This is the day when the boyfriend and girlfriend become husband and wife and in front of the altar that first encounter, perhaps fortuitous, has become a permanent covenant unto death. So God, like the lover, seeks out humanity who also, like a lover, looks for and loves God. This is the beautiful description that is presented to us in the first reading: *Wisdom hastens to make herself known in anticipation of the desires of women and men. Those who look for her at dawn will not be disappointed. They will find her seated at the gate (love seeks out the other). Those who watch for her will soon find themselves clothed by her. She makes her rounds, seeking those worthy of her and graciously appears to them on the road, and meets them with all solicitude* (10).

This thought is haunting. God has given us the gift of love and therefore it is sad that people prostitute this gift. The attraction between a man and a woman is a gift of God which is described in the Bible with such divine characteristics that people ought always to view respectfully this attraction to and this seeking out of one person by another. When the time comes and two people believe that they are sufficiently strong to love one another for the rest of their lives, they ritualize this love in a covenant.

Perhaps like me, there are many other people who find it difficult to understand how God can be in love with humanity. Perhaps as men we feel a certain repugnance to think of ourselves as loved by God, as if we were the feminine recipients of this love. But we have nothing to be embarrassed about. What is highlighted in this relationship of love is not the reality of gender, male or female, but rather the covenant between eternal love and humankind who have been created by love. This is what we must consider. When we come to understand that marriage is not simply the joining together of two people of the opposite sex but the establishment of a covenant between two children of God, then we also come to understand the meaning of the words of the book of Genesis: *let us make man in our image, after our likeness* (11). A young school girl once asked me: "Is He referring to a man or a woman?" I said: "to both, because man is only complete when joined to the other sex and seeking perfection in love. When a man and woman love each other so deeply that they offer themselves to each other for life, they are truly images of God. God is love: man and woman are never more perfect images of God than when they love each other, when they seal this union.

My sisters and brothers, it is for this reason that the covenant between Christ and the Church is a symbol that is hidden in every celebration of the sacrament of matrimony. Saint Paul, speaking to those who are married, says: *your love is a great mystery and it is for this reason that I think about Christ and the Church* (12). When a woman and a man love one another with a pure love, when they give themselves to one another, when they grow in holiness, then they reflect the love of Christ for his Church and manifest before the world the indissolubility of the love that unites Christ to the Church. When we understand that matrimony is a sign of God's love for humanity then we will also understand what it means to remain united with the Church and from within the Church to deeply and faithfully love the Church's spouse, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

When people are joined together in the sacrament of matrimony, all goods are then held in common by both people. This is expressed in the wedding ceremony when the groom presents thirteen coins (*arras*) to the bride as a sign of the mutual sharing of possessions --- all things are now held in common by both of them. In the same way Saint Paul refers to the Holy Spirit as the pledge and guarantee of the covenant between Christ and the Church (13). When Christ died for his Church, sanctified her, washed her with the blood that was shed on the cross, when Jesus rose and recuperated all the grace that we had lost because of our sin --- this treasure of redemption was then given to the Church by the Holy Spirit: *Receive the Holy Spirit, the pledge of this matrimony* (14). The Council has told us that the Church finds in the Holy Spirit all the things that she needs in order to sanctify humanity.

In another place the Council explains this idea of Christ entering in a covenant relationship with the Church at the time of the Passover event: *Christ, having been lifted up from the earth has drawn all to Himself. Rising from the dead, He sent His life-giving Spirit upon His disciples and through Him has established His Body which is the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation. Sitting at the right hand of the Father, He is continually active in the world that He might lead men to the Church and through it join them to Himself and that He might make them partakers of His glorious life by nourishing them with His own Body and Blood* (15). The fullness of time has arrived for us and the renewal of the world is irrevocably decreed. In a certain way it is advanced in this century because the Church here on earth is adorned with a true holiness, even though it is still imperfect. My sisters and brothers, let us rejoice in this present time of the Church. We do not have to wait for the hour of our death in order to experience God's great love for us and to discover the ways in which we have been enriched with the gifts of redemption. At this present time all Catholics who live in full communion with the Church, who are nourished by her Word, who live their lives with hope and who believe in eternal life --- these people are alive and are wed with Christ. They experience here on earth a foretaste of heaven and eternal happiness.

The universal restoration has been decreed from the day on which Christ died on the cross for the sins of all women and men and then rose to new life. The seed of this new life is present in the midst of history and the Church is the depository of this seed. The Church proclaims this reality of redemption. We have just heard the Council state: *Sitting at the right hand of the Father Christ is continually active in the world so that He might lead men to the Church* (16). The Church, the spouse of Christ is like the earthly administrator of the eternal goods of redemption. The Church on earth not only saves those who are within the heart of the Church, but also from her heart, where Christ lives as the bridegroom who is in love with his bride, acts with faithfulness and submission to Christ. In the Church Christ is the redeemer of humankind today, 1978 just as he was the redeemer during these past twenty centuries. Christ is wed to the Church and as a pledge has given the Church the fruits of redemption so that she might administer these in her Word, sacraments, forgiveness, hope

and her preaching of liberation from every form of slavery. My beloved sisters and brothers, I invite you to live in this present situation and to experience the joy of being a Church where Christ is active, is alive and will die no more. Indeed Christ is the bridegroom who loves his bride, the Church, whom he wed twenty centuries ago.

### **Marriage is a waiting**

My second idea is the following: marriage involves a waiting, especially when one of the spouses has been temporarily widowed. For this reason the Council states: *While on earth she journeys in a foreign land away from the Lord, the Church sees herself as an exile. She seeks and is concerned about these things which are above where Christ is seated at the right-hand of God, where the life of the Church is hidden with Christ in God until she appears in glory with her Spouse* (17). A wife who has been widowed can understand this just as a woman who weeps for her husband who has been sent into exile. She asks: *When will he be allowed to return to his native land?* This is the love of extended arms.

Therefore the Council embraces this inspiration that God has granted to his spouse, the Church, here on earth and proclaims the following beautiful words: *The Spirit and the Bride both say to Jesus, the Lord, "Come!"* (18). The ancient ceremonies concluded with the same words: *Maranatha! Come! We are waiting!* We also use the same words after proclaiming the words of Institution: *Let us proclaim the mystery of faith.* And the voice of the people which is the voice of the Church responds: *Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!* How beautiful it is when the voice that cries out is the voice of a people who have placed all their trust in the Lord Jesus and know that these pains of childbirth, this actual situation of our nation, are the natural cries of one who shouts out when confronted by sin, repression, slavery, sorrow, and injustice --- these are the natural cries of people who long for a new heaven and a new earth that will be given to us by the Lord Jesus.

My beloved sisters and brothers, this is another hour that we must live because we are not yet in heaven. It is true that as Church we have the guarantee that Christ lives in our midst, but this Christ is hidden, a Christ whom we experience near to us in the Eucharist and makes us exclaim: *Let us see you --- Christ will come again!* This is the beloved bride who from exile demands a kiss, an embrace and longs to live forever with her husband.

My sisters and brothers, this is a beautiful moment but how long will it last? This is precisely the place where the parable of the virgins finds its place (19). As I told you before, according to the customs of the people of Israel, the bridegroom, accompanied by his friends goes out to meet his bride to take her as his wife. This was a celebration that lasted for the whole night and naturally punctuality was not a characteristic of this event. Since the whole night was dedicated to this celebration, the ten virgins who accompanied the bridegroom slept. Five of them came prepared with oil and five of them were imprudent and brought no oil with them. *At midnight, there was a cry, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!"*. The virgins who had brought oil with them lit their lamps and were able to accompany the bridegroom, but the virgins who had not brought any oil said: *Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.* The wise virgins responded: *No, for there may not be enough for us and you. Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.* These latter women lacked foresight. This is part of Jesus' eschatological discourse and he is telling us: *be prepared for at the least expected hour the bridegroom will come to meet his bride who has been exiled --- the bridegroom will come to meet his Church.*

In ancient theology *the hour* was referred to with a very symbolic Greek word: *parousia*. This Greek word signified the appearance of a hidden God or the arrival of the emperor or the governor of a city and therefore a great reception was prepared for this person. This was called the *parousia*. In the Bible we hear about the coming of the Messiah, the second coming when all of history will be judged, the coming of Christ when he will gather up our life at the time of our death --- this is the *parousia*, the encounter, the waiting in life that will culminate with an encounter. Blessed are we if we are prepared with lamps of faith burning and fired by the oil of charity and good works. Woe to us if at the time of the *parousia* Christ should find us with our lamps extinguished, without oil, with sin in our hearts and unprepared.

This is the primary objective of today's homily, namely, to call people to live the hope that is described so marvelously by the Council: *therefore "while we are in the body, we are exiled from the Lord and having the first-fruits of the Spirit we groan within ourselves and we desire to be with Christ". By that same charity however, we are urged to live more for Him, who died for us and rose again. We strive therefore to please God in all things and we put on the armor of God that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil and resist in the evil day. Since, however, we know not the day nor the hour, on Our Lord's advice we must be constantly vigilant so that, having finished the course of our earthly life, we may merit to enter into the marriage feast with Him and to be numbered among the blessed and that we may not be ordered to go into eternal fire like the wicked and slothful servant, into the exterior darkness where "there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth" (20). These are the words of the Gospel (21) and the Council uses these words to warn us, as Church, about the important realities that we must communicate to humanity. We are the spouse of Christ that is exiled; we are going out to meet the bridegroom! Let us be prepared and not be like the unwise virgins who found the door closed to them and heard the words: *I do not know you* (22).*

My sisters and brothers, I want to repeat that the Church's mission to preach to the present world concerning her temporal duties is very difficult but also very necessary. When the Council says that the Church is in the world in order to serve the world, it states that her greatest service is to exhort Christians, citizens of this earthly city, to fulfill faithfully their temporal obligations, guided always by the gospel spirit (23). My sisters the brothers, the Council has described in a beautiful way each one of us: citizens of the earthly city, people of El Salvador with commitments on this earth, working on our farms or haciendas, workers or part of management. We are citizens of this earth: lawyers, professionals, politicians, people in the public market, people who earn a living by fulfilling their earthly duties, citizens of this earth --- the Church speaks to all of these different groups of people. At the same we are also citizens of an eternal city, and while we are exiled, we are, however, walking toward the eternal city. The Council states: *They are mistaken* --- note well these words because the Council speaks about those persons who want to gather in the sacristy and forget about the need to speak about the demands of justice and respect for the human rights of men and women (24) --- *they are mistaken who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek one which is to come, think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. For they are forgetting that by the faith itself they are more obliged than ever to measure up to these duties, each according to his proper vocation* (25). There are people who say that the bishop is preaching politics because he is speaking about human rights and condemning injustice and pointing out to women and men their political rights, their right to organize themselves. My sisters and brothers, I am simply saying that as citizens of heaven we must be very aware of what is happening on this earth so that when the time comes we can give an account of our actions to our God. It would be very wrong to live our lives in the

way that we have been accused of by the communists who say that our religion is opium for the people. We cannot simply await this future city and live our lives as we please on this earth.

They are also equally mistaken who think that they can totally commit themselves to temporal matters believing that these concerns are completely distinct from their religious obligations --- in this way they reduce religion to worship and the fulfillment of certain moral obligations. Many people have come to this conclusion and the Council states: *This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age* (26). We know there are people who view Christianity as simply a series of cultic events! People come to have their marriage blessed in the Church but never consider the fact that marriage is an expression of Christ's love for his Church. They view marriage as a social event --- is this wedding reception better than that other reception where people spent thousands of dollars? These acts of worship become acts of vanity because as people leave these ceremonies they act unjustly and prevent people for organizing unions and do not pay just wages --- but they consider themselves very religious because they go to Mass. These acts of worship are of no consequence when they are separated from the events of daily life. The Church must tell people that in their temporal concerns they must realize that they are accountable to God

The Council Fathers wrote words that I would like each one of you to engrave deeply in your hearts: *The Christian who neglects his temporal duties, neglects his duties toward his neighbor and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation* (27). What do these words mean my sisters and brothers? It is sad that our religion has at times betrayed the Gospel. In order to please women and men in high positions we have said that acts of worship were enough and thus have jeopardized the eternal salvation of these people. We are now returning to an authentic religion of the Gospel where Jesus says: *the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom* (28). Woe to those who do not take advantage of this time to perform good deeds and who do not go out to meet the Lord with charity and practical love! It is useless to be a virgin without love. Saint Bernard referred to such virgins as pure as angels but arrogant as devils<sup>2</sup>. Christian virtues must be an integral part of the life of a Christian. Jesus came to proclaim an integral redemption. Jesus does not want appearances but sincerity.

Thus, my beloved sisters and brothers, matrimony is a waiting. Do not forget that the Council says that the Church is still in her temporal phase (29). Therefore I want to take advantage of this time to tell those who are married that your marriage is also in a phase of waiting --- your marriage is never complete and perfected because each day it is necessary to forgive one another, to help one another, and to become more perfect. The man who wants to find his wife as a perfect angel or the woman who wants to find her husband as a heavenly being is very mistaken. Both husband and wife are flesh and bone, heirs of character defects and family defects --- they must learn to tolerate many things. The Church also needs her spouse to tolerate many things. The Council states (30): *The Church still lives in this temporal phase in which her sacraments, institutions, hierarchy, priests and other elements are afflicted with many imperfections, but she possesses a holiness that even though it is imperfect yet because of her good will she moves forward looking for that time of perfection.* This should not be forgotten so that we do not demand from the Church on earth that which she will only possess when she becomes the Church of perfect consummation.

## Life of the Church

My sisters and brothers, this is my third point. But before looking at this Church of perfect consummation, this Church that the book of Revelation describes as *a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband* (31), let us remember that as Church we have not yet achieved this reality. I want to speak about this Church on earth within which I attempt to situate the different events of the past week. My sisters and brothers, do not allow yourselves to be disturbed by all of this because if we forget that our Church is on pilgrimage during this week of November 1978 then the mystery Church is not incarnated as a spouse who walks toward the definitive encounter, toward that final consummation of her heavenly life. Therefore, what do we discover in our Church this week?

My sisters and brothers I have the joy of telling you that my greatest satisfaction this week has been to experience myself and the whole Archdiocese in communion with the Pope. To those who believe that my pastoral attitude and the pastoral guidelines of the Archdiocese are divorced from the true doctrine and attitude of the Church, I want to<sup>3</sup> remind you of the words that John Paul wrote to me as Archbishop:

*Vatican City, October 30. Your Excellency: on the occasion of the election of the Supreme Pontiff, his Holiness John Paul II wants to express to you his greeting in the name of all the members of the ecclesial community. I also have the pleasure of communicating to you that the Holy Father has received with profound joy the demonstration of brotherly closeness that was shown especially in your prayers for the intentions of the new Pastor of the Universal Church. I assure you that the Holy Father is most grateful and it is with pleasure that I extend his paternal blessing to every member of your portion of Christ's flock. Devotedly yours in the Lord, Cardinal Villot, Secretary of State.*

The Pope who wrote to us through his Secretary will take possession today of the Cathedral of Rome, Saint John Lateran. During this week the Pope has met the priests and the religious of his diocese and encouraged them to be faithful in fulfilling their priestly obligations, especially their obligation to live celibate lives as a clear and expressive sign of their mission as priests<sup>4</sup>. He said the same to the men and women religious telling them that their religious vocation means an exclusive love for God<sup>5</sup>. He said that if he is Pastor of the Universal Church it is because he is Bishop of Rome<sup>6</sup> and this means that this Sunday's ceremony when he takes possession of the Cathedral of Saint John Lateran (the cathedral of Rome) is a proclamation that he is the authentic successor of Saint Peter to the See of Rome and therefore is the Pastor of the Universal Church. With this explanation the Pope has also shown why it is possible to break the tradition and now have a Pope who is not Italian. While it might be convenient that the Bishop of Rome be Italian, as Pastor of the world, it is not necessary that the Bishop of Rome be Italian since he must enter into relationships with the whole world. Let us rejoice together on this day when we acknowledge the Bishop of Rome as our Universal Pastor.

During this week I also experienced joy in my priesthood because I witnessed the gratitude of the people in Santo Tomas during the celebration of the twentieth-fifth anniversary of Father Teodoro Alvarenga's ordination. These people have seen their pastor as the servant of their community from the time of his consecration to God. I had the profound joy of celebrating the Eucharist with the priests who celebrated the twentieth-fifth anniversary of their ordination as well as with Father Platero who celebrated his fiftieth



anniversary. Many lay people participated in this celebration and expressed their esteem for the priests and their respect for those who in their lives bear this priestly character that can never be taken away from them. I rejoice and want to tell our brothers who were priests but who are not exercising their ministry that they should never feel that they are separated from us because the character that you received at the time of your ordination has set you apart for all eternity and should make you feel very close to the life of the Church.

Last week the Confederation of Religious elected a new board. We wish them much success because we know that their objective is to perfect their consecration to God --- their consecration (as the Pope said) is an expression of an exclusive love for God. I also experienced a great joy in being able to share some time with the thirty priests (even though I was able to spend just a brief period of time with them) who were making a spiritual retreat that dealt with their priestly identity. This retreat was directed by Father Jesús Delgado. We had a very honest dialogue and I am grateful for this sense of solidarity that was expressed by almost all the priests who were making their retreat.

We also traveled through the communities that form the community of the Archdiocese. Yesterday we visited the city of San Martín on the occasion of their patronal feast and one of the highlights of the celebration was a program that was presented by the youth group. We also want to send our greetings to the people of Candelaria in Cuscatlán where the people will celebrate the patronal feast of Dulce Nombre de María on November 15<sup>th</sup>.

I also want to express my gratitude to the parish community of La Palma whose pastor, Father Vito Guatrato, came to visit me. In the name of the parish and the Franciscan community he expressed a profound sense of solidarity with the ministry of the archbishop. He said that in his parish those who are ill pray for the Archbishop and the Archdiocese. What a beautiful treasure are these prayers! May God bless you!

On the flyer that was published in La Palma there is a “warning” that should not be forgotten. This refers to the deception of certain Protestant groups who for example, on All Souls Day have preached against the Catholic custom of praying for those who have died and/or sell Protestant books in the name of the Archbishop.

Tomorrow in the village of San Antonio Managuil of San José de las Flores, Chalatenango, we will celebrate the patronal feast at 9:00am. In Arcatao, the Sisters who minister in that community have issued a warning against false denunciations which at times have been made by the enemies of the Church in order to embarrass and put in doubt the word of the Church. Be very careful in this matter because we need the denunciations that we speak about here to be well documented.

The Commission on the Laity has been charged by the Archbishop to meet monthly with four representatives of each Vicariate. The first meeting of this group is scheduled for next Sunday, November 19<sup>th</sup>, and will take place in the parish of San José de la Montaña. Since there are ten Vicariates this meeting will bring together 40 lay people.

This week our community is saddened by the fact that the Executive powers of the country have trampled upon one of the rights of the Archbishop when they changed the Statutes of Cáritas of El Salvador without the authorization of the Archbishop as stated in the Statutes. In *Orientación* you can read the letter that we have sent to the President<sup>7</sup>. The response of the Interior Minister<sup>8</sup> only aggravates this abuse because as a civil authority he is

able to explain this situation but he has decided to give an arbitrary interpretation to Canon Law which ought to be respected by these government officials since the Church is a legally recognized institution that is governed by its own laws.

We are saddened that in *El Diario de Hoy* some imaginary organization<sup>9</sup> used sophistry (sophistry means to use false arguments) in order to find a coincidence between an editorial that was published in *Orientación* and a statement of the FPL. The sophistry consisted in confusing distinct dates, referring to 1972 and 1978 simultaneously. The person(s) who wrote this article want to appear as though they were members of the Church and members of the FPL. They confused places and made it appear as though Santa Ana were part of the Archdiocese of San Salvador. And then they confused reasons --- *Orientación* deals with one reality and the statement dealt with something different. *Orientación* does not deal with propaganda nor is the Church in some kind of an alliance with FPL. As we stated in our Pastoral Letter, however, the Church is in agreement with the just demands of the workers. My sisters and brothers, it is precisely for this reason that I have said that we must learn to read the newspapers with a critical eye for as you can see sophistry is a tool that is used for deception. In the next edition of *Orientación* you will be able to read an explanation of what I have briefly referred to<sup>10</sup>.

### **Events of the week**

This community has reason to be sad because this week has been a week of violence. On Saturday, November 4<sup>th</sup>, Antonio Crespín Velásquez was violently removed from his house, handcuffed and taken off to an unknown destination.

On Monday, November 6<sup>th</sup>, the FPL assassinated the industrialist Roberto Saade<sup>11</sup> and Santos Elpidio who was accompanying him. This violent act was done to avenge the assassination of Guillermo Rivas. On the same day the workers Oscar Monterrosa and Enrique Antonio Orellana were violently taken from their homes by eighteen men who were wearing wigs and disguised as *campesinos*. They carried automatic weapons and now the whereabouts of these workers is unknown.

Tuesday of last week another armed movement (ERP) placed 40 explosives in different parts of the country. These explosions caused serious material damage. On the same day Santos Velasquez Nuñez, a member of UPT, was assassinated. His assassination is attributed to the security forces.

On Wednesday, November 8<sup>th</sup>, an attempt was made on the life of Doctor Ricardo Avilia Moreira, the first judge of the First Penal Court. He was wounded and this violent action has been attributed to the FPL. On the same day a member of the National Police died. Rodolfo Alvarado Montes was attacked on October 30<sup>th</sup> by supposed terrorists.

On Thursday, November 9<sup>th</sup>, Pedro Juan Cortés Ventura, the First Justice of the Peace in Tecoluca and a member of ORDEN and PCN, was assassinated.

This week the newspapers have published various instances of people who have disappeared. In some of these cases we are unsure if these people have been arrested or if they have disappeared. Here we refer to Francisco Baltasar Campos who disappeared on October 25<sup>th</sup>. It has been said that he was seen in the prisons of the National Police but they deny having arrested him. Also the names of people who have disappeared were

published: Gilberto Antonio Rivera on September 6<sup>th</sup>, José Aldán Vásquez on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, Santos Angel Vásquez Rodríguez, October 30<sup>th</sup> (Legal Aid assures us that he was arrested), and Rigoberto Esquivel Ponce, an elderly man of 75 disappeared at the end of October.

On November 6<sup>th</sup> we commemorated the capture of Professor Efrain Arévalo Ibarra, a member of the Executive Council of ANDES who was arrested by the National Police. The Security Forces, however, deny having him. On this same day we commemorated the assassination of the industrialist, Raúl Molina Cañas. I have also been asked by Julio Alberto Reynosa Vallecillos in the Parish of Ataco to denounce the fact that he had been tortured before being able to escape from the country<sup>12</sup>.

The labor conflicts have not been resolved in ADOC and in Sacos Sintéticos. The administrators are fearful of the union organization and have fired people who are possible union leaders. The strike that was declared this week by the worker in Fantasías y Novedades continues. We have been informed that there is hope that a dialogue will begin and we are hopeful that this will result in a prompt resolution of this matter. The workers at Fantasías y Novedades have received good news from the Minister of Labor who has recognized serious failures in the relationship between labor and management. Hopefully this intervention of the Government results in a just accord.

My beloved sisters and brothers, as you can see the events of this tragic week have different origins. I want to remind you (and this is not done by imaginary legionnaires) that in the same edition of *Orientación* in which they found ground for their sophism<sup>13</sup>, our Pastoral Letter was published. There we clearly stated the position of the Archdiocese with regard to violence and the right of people to organize themselves. I want to remind you that if the Church distinguishes between different forms of violence – and all the victims that were mentioned today have suffered distinct forms of violence --- nevertheless I said in the Pastoral Letter: *We cannot place all our trust in violent methods if we are true Christians or even simply honorable persons. The peace in which we believe is, however, the fruit of justice. As a simple analysis of our structures shows and as history confirms, violent conflicts will not disappear until their underlying causes disappear. To that extent, as long as the causes of our present distress persist, and as long as the powerful minority persist in their intransigence and refuse to accept even the smallest changes, then there will be renewed outbreaks of violence. Further use of repressive violence will unhappily do nothing more than increase the conflict and make less hypothetical and more real the situation in which recourse to force, in legitimate self-defense, can be justified. We therefore regard as a most urgent task the establishment of social justice*<sup>14</sup>.

### **Matrimony is a consummation, a wedding feast**

Finally, my sisters and brothers, this is the third point of my homily which leads us to the altar. This marriage which is an encounter, a covenant and a waiting, leads toward a consummation. Consummation --- that Church in heaven where justice will reign, where we will no longer weep week after week because of the pain of so many abuses, where the new heaven and the earth will sing of the blessed marriage between God and humanity and where the dream of God will become a reality.

For this reason I want to conclude my thought here with the beautiful words of the Council which refer to the Virgin Mary who was taken body and soul into heaven (32). She is the model and the beginning of that Church that will be consummated in the future. Until

that time, however, she is the bright star that accompanies the People of God who are on pilgrimage on this earth, she is the bright star that accompanies the People of God and gives them hope and consolation. I conclude with this remembrance of the Virgin because our hearts are moved on this November 12<sup>th</sup> when the people in San Miguel are beginning a Novena in honor of Our Lady of Peace. In the name of the whole Archdiocese may you pray that the mission of the Church might be better understood! Pray that Mary, the Mother of the Church who rejoices in the happiness of the consummated Church --- pray that she might enable us to live this hope and open our hearts to be able to receive the message that Christ brought to humankind so that we might prepare ourselves, like the wise virgins, for our encounter with the Lord. So be it.

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<sup>1</sup> The recording of this homily was incomplete and the tape frequently interrupted by outside interventions. To remedy this use has been made of the first edition transcription. See Monseñor Romero, *Su pensamiento*, Vol 5, San Salvador, pp. 289-302.

<sup>2</sup> The expression is not from St Bernard, but was said of the Jansenist Sisters of Port-Royal, probably by the Archbishop of Paris.

3 Discourse of John Paul II to the clergy of Rome (9 November 1978), *L'Osservatore Romano*, 19 November 1978.

4 Discourse of John Paul II to the religious sisters of Rome (10 November 1978), *L'Osservatore Romano*, 19 November 1978.

5 Discourse of John Paul II to the clergy of Rome, see above.

<sup>7</sup> See *Orientación*, 12 November 1978.

<sup>8</sup> See *Orientación*, 19 November 1978.

<sup>9</sup> See "Extraña coincidencia", comunicado de Legionarios de la Fe Católica, *El Diario de Hoy*, 10 November 1978.

<sup>10</sup> See Editorial of *Orientación*, 19 November 1978.

<sup>11</sup> Director and General Manager of INCA.

<sup>12</sup> See "Testimonio de torturado", *Orientación*, 19 November 1978.

<sup>13</sup> See *Orientación*, 10 September 1978.

<sup>14</sup> *La Iglesia y las organizaciones políticas populares* (6 August 1978), pp. 49-50.

*Marginal References* (1) Mt 24,1-2: (2) Mt 24,42-44: (3) Mt 25,1-13: (4) Mt 25,14-30: (5) Mt 9,14-15: (6) Jn 3,28-29: (7) Rv 21,2: (8) LG 6: (9) Ws 6,12: (10) Ws 6,13-16: (11) Gn 1,26: (12) Ep 5,32: (13) 2Cor 1,22: (14) Jn 20,22: (15) LG 48: (16) LG 48: (17) LG 6: (18) LG 4: (19) Mt 25,1-13: (20) LG 48: (21) Mt 25,30: (22) Mt 25,12: (23) GS 43: (24) GS 43: (25) GS 43: (26) GS 43: (27) GS 43: (28) Mt 25,1: (29) LG 48: (30) LG 48: (31) Rv 21,2: (32) LG 68.